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SUBJECT: URIBE'S VISIT TO GUATEMALA

1. (SBU) Summary: Colombia's President Uribe paid a highly successful visit to Guatemala January 19-20. He publicly committed to support Guatemala's bid for the UNSC, to provide counter-narcotics cooperation and to conclude a free trade agreement. Uribe's address to the Guatemalan Congress was widely praised. End summary.

2. (SBU) Guatemala's leading daily newspaper hailed Uribe's visit as "the most productive presidential visit" in recent memory because of the volume of agreements signed. Although the agreements on energy, education, scientific cooperation and tourism could charitably be described as "deliverables," there were signs that real cooperation in other areas, particularly counter-narcotics, picked up momentum as a result of Uribe's visit. Interior Minister Vielmann told the Embassy that, in advance of Uribe's visit, he had been in close consultation with his Colombian counterparts. Uribe publicly committed to lobbying Washington to extend Plan Colombia to the Central American countries, triggering envious press reports on the levels of U.S. assistance to Colombia, \$3 billion since 1999. Uribe also used his visit to promote the construction by 2008 of a pipeline through the Central American isthmus to carry natural gas from Mexico to Colombia.

3. (SBU) Uribe publicly promised to support Guatemala's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council. (Note: The MFA has sought to give its UNSC campaign a low profile domestically to keep it from becoming a political football. Guatemala's UNSC campaign therefore had hitherto received scant domestic media attention. An MFA source told us that, as a result of Uribe's public expression of support, the MFA is preparing to brief the press on the UNSC race.)

4. (SBU) Uribe and President Berger reportedly committed to begin negotiating a free trade agreement within the next two months. The Guatemalans see the potential agreement as a step towards future agreements with the Andean Community and Mercosur. Trade between the two countries represented just over one percent of total Guatemalan trade in 2004, with Guatemala importing about \$116 million and exporting about \$6.6 million to Colombia. The Guatemalan press highlighted Uribe's mention of "an equity clause to correct the asymmetries between the two signatories. The more developed partner will compensate the inequalities of the weaker." The reference to "equality" was very resonant in the Guatemalan press, which has a tendency to portray trade negotiations with the United States as a David versus Goliath struggle.

5. (SBU) Comment: Uribe's visit was highly successful in part because of Guatemalan sympathy for Colombia. Still dealing with the consequences of its own 36-year internal armed conflict, Guatemala is also contending with the deleterious effects of the narco-trafficking that transits Guatemala en route to the United States and Europe. The pro-business Berger Administration openly admires Uribe for his brave resolve and would do well to follow his example.

DERHAM